

gaming mode may end when all prize objects on the game board are awarded, or a particular designated prize on the game board is awarded.

[0051] If the process does not decide to end the group gaming mode at block 514, it returns to block 510 where it continues to receive messages from the participating EGM's when prize objects are awarded. If the process decides to end the group gaming mode at block 514, it goes to block 516 where it transmits a message to all EGM's in the set commanding them to end the group gaming mode. In response to this message, as indicated with respect to FIG. 3, the gaming machines remove the group game board from secondary display area 48 and return the functionality of the gaming machine back to the normal primary game mode.

[0052] While the example embodiment described herein uses a single set of prize objects in the group gaming board during the group gaming mode, other embodiments may employ multiple game boards in the group gaming mode. For example, when all prize objects on a board are awarded, the board may fill again with more prize objects and display a different theme. This feature may be used when a group gaming mode is designated to last a certain period of time and the time has not expired when the final prize object is awarded. This feature may also be used in order to encourage wagering during the group gaming mode, for example if the average wagering level among the set of participating gaming machines is above a certain level, the process may decide not to end the group gaming mode and instead present a second group game board when all prize objects on the group game board are awarded. In such case, if the average wagering level does not qualify, the process may decide to end the group gaming mode when all prize objects on the group game board are awarded. An award of a particular designated prize object may also trigger the group gaming mode to activate such an additional set of prize objects.

[0053] FIG. 6 shows a gaming machine 100 that may be used to implement feature games according to the present invention. The block diagram of FIG. 7 shows further details of gaming machine 100. Referring to FIG. 5, gaming machine 100 includes a cabinet 101 having a front side generally shown at reference numeral 102. A primary video display device 104 is mounted in a central portion of the front surface 102, with a ledge 106 positioned below the primary video display device and projecting forwardly from the plane of the primary video display device. In addition to primary video display device 104, the illustrated gaming machine 100 includes a secondary video display device 107 positioned above the primary video display device. Gaming machine 100 also includes two additional smaller auxiliary display devices, an upper auxiliary display device 108 and a lower auxiliary display device 109. All of the displays may include touchscreen sensors, especially display 109 which may be used to present touchscreen controls for wagering. It should also be noted that each display device referenced herein may include any suitable display device including a cathode ray tube, liquid crystal display, plasma display, LED display, or any other type of display device currently known or that may be developed in the future.

[0054] In preferred versions, the gaming machine 100 illustrated in FIG. 5 also includes a number of mechanical control buttons 110 mounted on ledge 106. These control buttons 110 may allow a player to select a bet level, select paylines, select a type of game or game feature, and actually

start a play in a primary game. Further, primary video display device 104 in gaming machine 100 provides a convenient display device for implementing touchscreen controls.

[0055] Gaming machine 100 may also include a number of other player interface devices in addition to devices that are considered player controls for use in playing a particular game. The ledge may also include a hardware special object including a button, touch sensor, or switches, joysticks, or other mechanical input devices, and/or virtual buttons and other controls implemented on a suitable touchscreen video display. Gaming machine 100 also includes a currency/voucher acceptor having an input ramp 112, a player card reader having a player card input 114, and a voucher/receipt printer having a voucher/receipt output 115. One or more of these devices provides a credit input device in communication with the controller and adapted for accepting a physical item associated with a monetary value that establishes a player credit balance. Audio speakers 116 generate an audio output to enhance the user's playing experience.

[0056] FIG. 5 shows a gaming machine 100 that may be used to implement feature games according to the present invention. The block diagram of FIG. 6 shows further details of gaming machine 100. Referring to FIG. 6, gaming machine 100 includes a cabinet 101 having a front side generally shown at reference numeral 102. A primary video display device 104 is mounted in a central portion of the front surface 102, with a ledge 106 positioned below the primary video display device and projecting forwardly from the plane of the primary video display device. In addition to primary video display device 104, the illustrated gaming machine 100 includes a secondary video display device 107 positioned above the primary video display device. Gaming machine 100 may also be connected to a group display device mounted above a group of machines (typically at least 4 machines which may be side by side or arranged in a circle). An auxiliary display device 109 may present touchscreen player controls for entering wager levels and other commands. It should also be noted that each display device referenced herein may include any suitable display device including a cathode ray tube, liquid crystal display, plasma display, LED display, or any other type of display device currently known or that may be developed in the future.

[0057] In preferred versions, the gaming machine 100 illustrated in FIG. 6 also includes a number of mechanical control buttons 110 mounted on ledge 106. These control buttons 110 may allow a player to select a bet level, select paylines, select a type of game or game feature, and actually start a play in a primary game. Further, primary video display device 104 in gaming machine 100 provides a convenient display device for implementing touchscreen controls.

[0058] It will be appreciated that gaming machines may also include a number of other player interface devices in addition to devices that are considered player controls for use in playing a particular game. The ledge may also include a hardware special object including a button, touch sensor, or switches, joysticks, or other mechanical input devices, and/or virtual buttons and other controls implemented on a suitable touchscreen video display. Gaming machine 100 also includes a currency/voucher acceptor having an input ramp 112, a player card reader having a player card input 114, and a voucher/receipt printer having a voucher/receipt